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Information and communication technologies for development

Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development

Summary by the President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly

I. Background and introduction

1. The present document contains the summary by the President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly of the meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development which took place at Headquarters on 17 and 18 June 2002. Responding to the mandate contained in General Assembly resolution 56/258 of 31 January 2002, the meeting addressed the digital divide in the context of globalization and the development process and promoted coherence and synergies between various regional and international information and communication technologies initiatives.

2. The convening of the meeting reaffirmed the fact that the United Nations system was recognized as a catalyst for fostering digital opportunities and putting information and communication technologies (ICTs) at the service of development. The adoption of the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council, which was subsequently endorsed by the Millennium Summit, provided the framework for the efforts of the United Nations in that regard. The General Assembly, as the most universal representative forum, needed to provide leadership and direction for evolving a meaningful, action-oriented and coordinated response by the international community to the global challenge of ICTs in the service of development, thus helping to achieve the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

3. The distinguishing feature of the current General Assembly meeting was the broad and high-level participation by all stakeholders in the area of economic and social development, including ministers, high officials, the private sector (a record number of more than 200 leading private companies attended) and civil society. The President of Senegal, who heads the relevant work in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), addressed the meeting, thus setting the tone for a businesslike and action-oriented dialogue.

4. It was the wish of the General Assembly that the meeting be organized in a manner that would assist Governments and all the relevant partners in their preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society, and focus on the need to promote coherence and synergies between the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force and the Digital Opportunities Task Force (DOT Force). The Secretary-General of the International

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Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Chairman of the ICT Task Force and the Chairman of the DOT Force were invited by a special resolution of the General Assembly, resolution 56/281 of 1 May 2002, to make statements at the plenary meeting of the Assembly.

5. To ensure productive interaction of all participants while preserving the intergovernmental character of the General Assembly deliberations, two informal panels were held in parallel to the plenary meetings. A number of side events, including thematic working breakfasts and luncheons, were organized on both days to provide opportunities for interaction among the delegates and other participants, including the private sector representatives. The discussions clearly showed the value of bringing together a representative group of stakeholders from all sectors and all regions of the world.

6. The theme of the meeting devoted to information and communication technologies for development was considered to be particularly important and timely in the context of the information revolution and it emphasized the urgent need for digital divide-bridging strategies. The dialogue deepened the understanding of the digital divide as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, and the debates were informative and productive. The issues raised in the dialogue could be useful inputs into upcoming major conferences and meetings, including the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg as well as into the follow-up to the Millennium Summit of the United Nations.

II. Overview

7. In general terms, the two-day discussions could be summarized as follows. It was generally agreed that the United Nations was uniquely placed to forge the collective political will of the Member States and to provide the normative policy framework for addressing the challenges of ICT policies, and best able to bring together and coordinate all stakeholders in partnership for development, including bilateral, multilateral, regional and interregional actors as well as the private sector and civil society, and to create synergies and cooperation in support of the development objectives of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

8. Another recurrent theme was that the capacities for successful integration into the global economy differed among certain groups of developing countries, requiring a differentiated approach. At the same time, developing countries shared similar concerns, leading to a convergence of policy prescriptions as a result. A number of participants described national experiences with and responses to globalization and informatization. While recognizing the specificity of country circumstances, lessons could be drawn from them in defining new development strategies more consistent with those challenges. Emphasis was placed on the need for country-driven strategies for development.

9. In that context, it was repeatedly stressed that many developing countries, acutely familiar with the benefits of ICTs, required support from the international community to fully realize those benefits. Stakeholders must provide adequate resources to realize the digital opportunity for developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The cooperation between developed and developing countries was thus one crucial element for bridging the digital divide, but the potential of collaboration among developing countries (South-South cooperation) should also be fully explored. At the same time, regional collaborative efforts should be recognized and promoted. The United Nations could play an important role in promoting public awareness of the wider applications of information technology for development and poverty eradication in developing countries.

10. Many participants stressed that gender aspects must be addressed in the context of ICTs and development, as the impact of ICTs was not gender-neutral. ICTs could contribute to the empowerment of women, to reducing gender inequalities, and to the active participation of disabled and elderly persons in socio-economic life and development.

11. The meeting provided a strong validation of the multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities brought forward by the information revolution. Participants felt that it would be difficult for Governments to achieve tangible results without the active involvement of the private sector and civil society. In the final analysis, it was the civil society — citizens, industry, consumers and academics — that applied ICTs as users, consumers or producers. The private sector could contribute to

building up an ICT infrastructure in developing countries.

III. Summary of the plenary debate

12. The two-day meeting opened with statements by the President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, followed by a series of speakers. At the closing plenary meeting, the Chairmen of the two informal panels presented the salient points from deliberations of their respective panels. In conclusion, a statement by the President of the General Assembly summarized the high-level meeting.

13. In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly expressed his conviction that the meeting provided an invaluable opportunity for an open and constructive exchange of ideas on ways to integrate information and communication technologies into development efforts, as well as to raise the political profile and awareness of ICTs in order to mobilize further support from key partners to address the important challenges ahead. He stated that the ICT revolution was opening new opportunities for economic growth and social development, and new technologies could make a tangible difference in the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world, empowering them to take full advantage of the globalized world economy.

14. The President also emphasized that ICTs could contribute to the empowerment of women and reduce gender inequalities. Moreover, those efforts could bridge the distances between urban communities and strengthen the global fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. However, he added that, given the very dynamic nature of new information technologies, every day that passed without effective action further widened the digital divide. The need for a concerted effort by the international community was a matter of utmost urgency. Reacting to that call for action, participants in the meeting agreed that political leadership at the highest level was necessary to more effectively integrate ICT for development programmes into national development strategies, to create supportive regulatory and legal environments, and to build an effective matrix of international cooperation. The United Nations played an indispensable role in regard to ensuring the effectiveness of ICTs for development and must work to bring all the stakeholders together.

15. The Secretary-General emphasized in his statement to the opening plenary meeting that over the last few years a wide consensus had emerged on the potential of information and communication technologies to promote economic growth and the integration of developing countries into the global economy. Seizing the opportunities of the digital revolution was one of the most pressing challenges and a great deal had already been done. The Secretary-General mentioned the ICT Task Force not only as a key forum for discussions on policies, but also as a platform for forging partnerships among different stakeholders and building bridges to other similar initiatives. Yet despite commendable efforts and various initiatives, the world was still very far from ensuring that the benefits of ICTs were available to all. He stressed that efforts to reverse that situation must be based on the real needs of those requiring help, and that those people and countries must be fully and genuinely involved in that effort at all stages. There was a real need for the many initiatives to come together, united by a common purpose and common determination.

16. The Secretary-General strongly stressed the need to sustain such efforts over the long term. In recent years, a number of promising initiatives had not lived up to expectations, principally because of insufficient long-term commitment on the part of initiators and sponsors. There was a clear lesson for the Task Force and other initiatives: to be effective over time, they must be nurtured by stakeholders, supported by continued involvement and provided with adequate resources over the long term.

17. In addressing the plenary meeting, the President of Senegal noted that closing the gap in the use of information technologies had become a high priority on the agenda of NEPAD. The struggle to harness the benefits of new technologies was well under way, and signs were pointing towards the direction of a digital revolution for Africa. One example of recent advances was the use of underwater fibre-optic networks that now linked at lower costs millions of Africans with their neighbours, as well as people living in other regions. The President of Senegal highlighted the recent launch of a "cybervillage" in his country, which aimed to host major enterprises and promote start-up projects for young Africans wishing to participate in

the new economy. He stated that the time had come for Africa to make use of its human resources through, among other means, e-trade and e-business strategies, and expressed the belief that full participation could be achieved in a short period of time. Other local and regional projects initiated by NEPAD and other African partners would provide the people of Africa with the same opportunities that existed in the developed world. He stressed that partnerships must provide equal opportunities to all countries, for all men and women. He urged global actors to look first at the widespread gaps in the availability of computers. He finally appealed to all interested partners, donors, scientists and educators to work towards providing all nations with a "common scientific laboratory" for the benefit of all.

18. The Secretary-General of ITU noted that political leaders, particularly those in developing countries, should invest in the new information technologies and make it their number one priority policy issue. While acknowledging that developing countries had many other development priorities, leaders should, however, seriously consider and understand the importance and the opportunities presented by the new information technologies in advancing development in their countries.

19. The Chairman of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force noted that the evolution of globalization at different speeds among different countries and regions was causing a sense of exclusion not only in the developing world, but also in pockets of the developed world. That sense of economic exclusion was also being felt as a lack of political representation in terms of peoples, as well as issues. Noting the failure of markets to properly address the global commons in a courageous and proactive manner, he said there was a seeming inadequacy in the existing institutional framework to address prevalent difficulties and challenges. It was against that backdrop that the millennium development goals reminded the world of the tasks ahead. Two years along the road towards 2015, there was a need for a new approach, as well as for the mainstreaming of ICTs in all development efforts, if those goals were to be achieved. A new approach required a collaborative effort among relevant intergovernmental organizations, good working public institutions, a more engaged private sector with a better sense of global corporate responsibility, and a civil society that not only pointed out the issues to be tackled, but also participated actively in tackling them.

20. The Chairman of the Group of Eight (G-8) Digital Opportunities Task Force noted the importance of ICTs as a catalyst for social and economic transformation, and spoke about how the DOT Force, in partnership with other international initiatives and organizations, was addressing the tremendous opportunity for global development. In today's environment, basic access to knowledge and information was becoming a prerequisite for modern human development. In that context, ICTs were increasingly recognized as much more than a key economic sector. They were seen as a vital tool for economic modernization, as well as a vehicle for social, cultural and civic enrichment. While there were many real life examples of how ICTs enabled societies to promote sustainable growth, advance social justice and strengthen democratic governance, the potential of such technologies for development was, unfortunately, still largely underutilized. The widening digital gap between rich and poor and unequal access to ICTs had produced uneven levels of participation in the networked economy and society. Literally billions of people could be left outside the globally connected world.

21. In the general discussion that followed those important statements, several speakers noted that the digital divide was a multifaceted phenomenon. It was a divide that affected individuals, men and women, businesses and regions — particularly rural and urban areas — and a serious divide between countries also existed. There was a concern that developing countries might not fully participate in the international information community and economy, especially when they might not meet the conditions of basic economic and social infrastructure. That situation underscored the widening of the digital divide.

22. It was mentioned that developing countries needed also to build the necessary infrastructure to use new technologies, as well as to formulate relevant regulatory legislation. The international community, and especially the private sector, could contribute a great deal to the establishment of an ICT infrastructure in developing countries. International cooperation was generally seen as an optimal approach to bridging the digital divide. It was important to combine the market potential of the developing countries with the technological advances of the developed ones. Such an effort would not only benefit the developing countries,

but potentially open more markets for the developed countries as well. The participation of stakeholders, particularly the private sector, was therefore seen by numerous speakers as essential for the process. However, as a precondition for international cooperation, developing countries themselves must establish an environment congenial to private sector activities.

23. A very prominent theme in the statements was the importance of human resource development, education and training. While education had always been an important development initiative, it was now seen as a fundamental factor in bridging the digital divide and harnessing information technologies. Although many Governments had left the provision of telecommunications services to the private sector, Governments themselves must take the lead in education, bringing their entire infrastructure into play to achieve the fullest possible advantage from the comprehensive use of ICTs. That could be used as an opportunity to take another look at education strategies, particularly the role of vocational training centres or information technology centres. Support strategies could provide skills training to address specific demands of the modern information society. The development of such skills within developing countries could be an essential way to attract private investment and contribute to economic growth and development. The importance of the fight against cyberterrorism and cybercrime was also stressed in view of the vulnerability of the information society and the urgent need to combat international terrorism.

24. Speakers welcomed the recent establishment of the ICT Task Force and stated their hope that that would enhance collaboration within the United Nations system, giving impetus to a wealth of collaborative efforts by Governments, multilateral institutions, donors, the private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to enhance the developmental impact of ICTs. The ICT Task Force was seen as a key global forum in the area of ICT for development. Many speakers noted the importance of such innovative partnerships under the United Nations umbrella creating positive spin-off and generating momentum for creating similar partnerships in other areas.

25. Participants emphasized the importance of the current meeting of the General Assembly in the light of the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, and hoped it would contribute a great deal to the preparations for the Summit. Participants expressed their belief that the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society should address the issue of digital divide in the context of globalization and development, and deliberate on the broadest range of questions concerning the emerging global information society. A common vision and understanding to ensure the effective and equitable character of such a global information society must be found, as a way to turn the digital divide into a digital opportunity. It was noted that the World Summit on the Information Society would be the first summit meeting on the information society with universal participation, and its success would depend on a coordinated effort by all actors. It offered a unique opportunity to develop and implement a policy declaration and action plan to promote the information society from a coordinated perspective.

IV. Summary of the informal panels

26. Two informal panels were held on 17 and 18 June 2002. They were chaired by a Vice-President of the General Assembly. The first covered the theme "How can ICTs leverage development to meet the Millennium Summit Goals, building on multi-stakeholder partnerships for promoting digital opportunity?" It focused on ideas and proposals put forward in the context of ICT for development and cooperation among the private, public and non-governmental entities.

27. The second panel was on the theme "The role of the United Nations in supporting efforts to promote digital opportunity, in particular in Africa and the least developed countries: challenge of inclusion in the world economy through ICT". Presenters and participants in this panel engaged in a wide-ranging discussion aimed at better understanding the situation and opportunities and constraints in Africa and the further steps that the United Nations system could undertake.

28. Both informal panels resulted in a valuable and constructive exchange of views and ideas. The salient points are summarized below.

A. First informal panel

29. Panellists, delegates and other private sector and civil society participants focused their discussion on

the issues of leverage and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Participants recognized that the key issues concerning ICTs were not technological themselves but pertained more to purpose, governance, mindset, leadership, policy, vision, willingness and resources. ICTs were recognized as a great tool, but one that required the proper environment to make it effective. ICTs could have considerable leverage for promoting development and reducing poverty, but there were many complications to be overcome. Most immediately it was noted that countries with the lowest levels of telephone and Internet usage had the highest phone, connectivity and bandwidth costs.

30. A particular concern was how to merge the goals of business and development. Business interests naturally focused on earnings, and therefore attention needed to be given to emphasizing the market opportunities of development. Panellists emphasized that the assets or competencies that private sector participants brought to the equation included deep ICT expertise, a solutions-approach, inventive capability, an extensive talent base, proven business methodologies, credibility and access to other organizations, and some "social investment" funds (resources for philanthropy). Emphasis was placed on devising multi-stakeholder partnerships that leveraged the competencies of the private sector. It was underlined that ICTs could be a "win-win" solution if business interests realized that bridging the digital divide in developing countries was good business, producing more customers, more purchases and higher living standards.

31. Participants gave much attention to the ways in which improved communications technology, especially the Internet, could facilitate the work of government, and conversely, government's need to put online a great deal of content useful to the citizenry. "E-governance" was seen as leading to customer-centred solutions, and Governments could learn from the private sector in that regard. ICTs could lead to information-sharing, more democratic and accountable government functions and expanded commerce, but not always, and not with a level playing field. Examples were given of ways to save money and speed administrative work through the use of ICTs. Even taking into account start-up costs, short-term benefits could be identified from the experience of some speakers.

32. It was mentioned that a number of problems handicapped the introduction and expansion of ICTs to leverage development. There was not one digital divide but several — rural/urban, young/old, rich/poor, white collar/blue collar, and so forth. Access was a key, but access alone was not sufficient. Basic problems could be listed as including electricity, infrastructure, computers and other devices, skilled users, and content. Moreover, ICTs alone did not lead to development. They needed to be integrated into other efforts with adequate financing and skills from various quarters. Other problems included resistance to change and hoarding of information by those in charge of it at all levels. Another was lack of understanding of system requirements and the various costs of the totality of changes involved. There might be a feeling that the costs were unaffordable and the purposes unrealistic, and that ICTs were a luxury for poor countries with limited infrastructure and budgets.

33. An opinion was expressed that, on the government side, ICTs must be recognized as a necessity, not a luxury, in government budgets. They were not an alternative to other expenditure but a requisite tool for development — thus the approach should be ICTs for education, for health, for government administration and finance, and so forth. On the business side, ICTs should be seen as an area for converting development concerns into business opportunities. Thus ICTs could leverage development as businesses saw the merit of overcoming the digital divides in relation to customers, investments, savings and earnings. Government had a role to encourage and shape business interests, and the private sector and civil society had important roles for innovation and income-generation. Leadership was very important at all levels. Such leadership helped to shape the policy agenda and the implementation of innovation and led to the generation of an expanding supply of local content. The participants agreed that a growing partnership among the United Nations, the private sector and civil society was important for leveraging development through ICTs, and that the current meeting of the General Assembly could offer an important impetus to further that end.

B. Second informal panel

34. Presenters and participants in this panel engaged in a wide-ranging discussion aimed at a better understanding of the situation, opportunities and constraints in Africa and further steps that the United

Nations system could undertake. Speakers focused on the value the United Nations could add to ICT for development efforts. They noted that, taking into account the multifaceted involvement of the Organization, it became important to think how best to use the comparative advantage of the United Nations.

35. During the discussions a convergence of interests became evident, among speakers representing major corporations, foundations, governments, entrepreneurships and other institutions. The common interest was to engage and invest where productive outcomes were possible, and it was evident that despite difficulties for promoting ICTs, numerous opportunities could be identified, particularly in Africa. It was recognized that international donor assistance should be a supplement, helping to shape capacities and policies, but that the driving force for ICT expansion would necessarily be derived from the realities of commerce, investment, and business and government requirements. Speakers declared that it was possible to see in Africa a sense of emerging accomplishment and to say that in a sense Africa was at the cutting edge of the challenges for leveraging development through ICT.

36. Despite the many indicators showing Africa at a disadvantage, speakers pointed out the economic opportunities already being grasped and the potential for further growth as the advantages of ICTs became more widespread. The role of government was seen as best focusing on four elements: working with investors for connectivity; helping to make the population digitally competent; supporting local content development; and convincing people that the Internet and ICTs could change lives, and leading in that by example. Speakers thought that the opportunities for the United Nations system might best be identified as:

- Helping to shape global policy-making
- Promoting dialogue and commitment in such settings as the United Nations ICT Task Force, the World Economic Forum Task Force, and so forth
- Supporting capacity-building of developing countries to furnish a better investment environment, including regulatory and legal frameworks, and to enable greater competence in performance and in negotiation with investors and vendors
- Encouraging a greater sense of partnership among government, the private sector and civil society actors to work together for mutual advantage.

37. Accordingly, the United Nations could help Africa and the least developed countries to put technology at the service of development by building capacity, fostering innovation, building partnerships, and coordinating funding. It was noted that the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh elucidated how ICTs could be relevant and profitable to even the poorest of the poor.

38. Speakers recognized the tremendous constraints and challenges facing least developed countries, in particular in Africa, in ICTs. Those included infrastructure and institutional needs and high costs of telephone and Internet connections, service, and maintenance. Some speakers believed that government-owned telecommunications monopolies should be deregulated, as they felt that market forces would stimulate innovation and a reduction of costs. Another problem was that the small sizes of the economy and the market in many African countries posed challenges to the private sector, owing to the small scale in relation to costs. Another challenge was the stimulation of ICT-related local industries including through public/private and private/private partnerships.

39. Speakers recognized that ICTs could be used for various purposes, including human development, health and education, promotion of good governance and human rights. But those goals needed to be articulated by appropriate strategies and policies for poverty eradication and development. The role of the United Nations in that respect was to help developing countries to develop policies and strategies for creation of an enabling environment, capable of taking full advantage of ICT potentials.

40. Inclusion and partnership had both been identified as two very important aspects of the ICT process. Genuine and sustainable partnerships were based on a vision and goals shared by all stakeholders. Their involvement was thus essential to ensure the integration of a variety of dimensions related to the introduction and expansion of ICTs, in particular education, entrepreneurship and policy. The United Nations could play an important role in bridging, coordinating and integrating initiatives taking place at various levels involving all those dimensions.

V. Conclusion

41. At the closing plenary meeting, on 18 June 2002, a statement was delivered on behalf of the President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly by a Vice-President. On behalf of the General Assembly, the President expressed his sincere gratitude to all who had participated in the two-day meeting of the Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development. The participation of the President of Senegal, the Secretary-General, the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Chairmen of the United Nations ICT Task Force and the G-8 Digital Opportunities Task Force, the Secretary-General of ITU and a large number of ministers as well as the high number of speakers at the four plenary meetings clearly showed the importance attached to this topic. The President particularly thanked the panellists, keynote speakers and lead discussants, many of them coming from the private sector and non-profit organizations, for sharing their views with delegations during the two informal panels.

42. Highlighting the main issues of the meeting, which aimed at fostering digital opportunities for all in the emerging information society, the President noted that the meeting was recognized as an important and timely initiative, especially in the light of a persistent digital divide between developed and developing countries, as well as within countries. The ICT revolution was opening new opportunities for economic growth and social development. A wide consensus had emerged on the potential of ICT to promote sustainable growth; to combat poverty; to strengthen democratic governance; to contribute to the empowerment of women in reducing gender inequalities; to promote the active participation of disabled and elderly persons in socio-economic development; to bridge the distance between rural and urban populations; and to significantly strengthen the global fight against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria. In short, ICTs represented a strategic instrument for achieving the millennium development goals. However, ICT for development was still underused in many parts of the world. The digital divide threatened to further marginalize the economies and peoples of many developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition. The challenge of transforming that digital divide into digital opportunities required international commitment and cooperation.

43. The United Nations and other international organizations were recognized as a catalyst for fostering digital opportunities and putting ICTs at the service of development. The adoption of the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2000 of the Economic and Social Council, which was subsequently endorsed by the Millennium Summit, provided the framework for the efforts of the United Nations in that regard. The General Assembly, the most universal and representative body of the United Nations system, was recognized as a forum for evolving a meaningful, action-oriented and coordinated response by the international community to bridge the digital divide, thus helping to achieve the development goals of the Millennium Declaration. The meeting also welcomed the establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force, which was becoming a key forum on how ICTs could help to achieve the millennium development goals and in promoting policy coherence and coordination among international initiatives. The valuable contributions made by the G-8 DOT Force in raising awareness, linking networks and promoting multi-stakeholder initiatives were also emphasized.

44. The meeting recognized the significance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for leveraging development with the use of ICTs. Many delegates emphasized the importance of collaborative partnerships between Governments, civil society and the private sector in order to ensure that the benefits of ICTs became available to all. The private sector had a key role in developing and disseminating ICTs. Governments were responsible for providing transparent regulatory and legal frameworks that integrated the specific needs of developing countries. Civil society could bring a broader, participatory and inclusive approach to ICT development. And all stakeholders, as the Secretary-General stressed in his important intervention on 17 June, should nurture their multi-stakeholder initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and long-term sustainability, including by providing adequate resources.

45. Developing countries were well aware of their ICT needs for national development, but required support from the international community to fulfil those needs. Adequate resources must be provided to realize the digital opportunity for developing countries and countries with economies in transition. Cooperation between developed and developing countries was thus one crucial element for bridging the

digital divide, but the potential of collaboration among developing countries (South-South cooperation) should also be fully explored. At the same time, regional collaborative efforts should be recognized and promoted. For example, in his speech the President of Senegal shared with the General Assembly the challenges faced by NEPAD in achieving economic and social development objectives. ICTs had been recognized as one of the main priorities of NEPAD. Those regional initiatives needed full international support.

46. It was stressed that deliberations at the meeting of the General Assembly would also make a significant contribution to the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society. The Summit would be a major opportunity to discuss measures to be taken for bridging the digital divide and to use the full potential of ICTs to reach the millennium goals.

47. The President expressed his satisfaction with the most substantive discussions held in the context of the two-day meeting. The General Assembly had stressed the importance of ICT for development and reaffirmed the commitment of Member States to mainstreaming ICTs in development issues. The realization of the potential of ICT for development required a broad international commitment of political leaders to act in concert. It was up to Member States and other stakeholders to bridge the digital divide and turn it into a digital opportunity. The President expressed his hope to see continued cooperation among stakeholders in bridging the digital divide.